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1995 ANNUAL REPORT

REHABILITATION ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND



MISSOURI REHABILITATION SERVICES FOR THE BLIND



MEL CARNAHAN
GOVERNOR

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DIVISION OF FAMILY SERVICES
REHABILITATION SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
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December 29, 1995

Governor Mel Carnahan
Missouri State Capitol Building
Jefferson City, Missouri 65101

Dear Governor Carnahan:

Enclosed you will find the 1995 annual report produced by the Rehabilitation Advisory Council for the Blind. In this, our second year, we have continued to provide a steady influence during a period of widespread agency changes. Our review of agency policies, procedures and operations has given consumers an important method of input on the rehabilitation process for Missourians who are blind.

We hope that you find this report both informative and readable. We stand prepared to answer any questions about this report, the operations of Rehabilitation Services for the Blind or the work of the Rehabilitation Advisory Council.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kent Kolaga", with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Kent Kolaga
Chairman
Rehabilitation Advisory
Council for the Blind



MEL CARNAHAN
GOVERNOR

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December 29, 1995

Fred Schroeder, Commissioner
United States Department of Education
Office of Special Education and
Rehabilitation Services
Rehabilitation Services Administration
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Commissioner Schroeder:

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Kent Kolaga
Chairman
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REHABILITATION ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR THE BLIND

CHAIRMAN - KENT KOLAGA

VICE-CHAIRMAN - JERRY ANNUNZIO

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LORENA PERKINS
GARY WUNDER**

**STAFF MEMBERS - RITA LYNCH
MIKE MERRICK**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Page 1

CLOSURE DATA

Page 3

SECTION II. STATUS OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

Page 6

SECTION III. RSB STRATEGIC PLAN

Page 13

SECTION IV. ACTIVITIES OF THE REHABILITATION ADVISORY COUNCIL DURING FY 1995

Page 18

SECTION V. SUMMARY

Page 21

SECTION I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State Rehabilitation Advisory Council for the Blind (RACB), created by Executive Order 93-01 on February 5, 1993, is responsible for reviewing, analyzing, and advising Rehabilitation Services for the Blind (RSB), a section of the Missouri Division of Family Services (DFS), on its performance of vocational rehabilitation services to persons who are blind or visually impaired in Missouri.

During the period of this report, the RACB took part in many activities to further the interests of vocational rehabilitation consumers in Missouri. The Council was active in many ways: assisting in RSB planning efforts, informing legislators on issues pertaining to vocational rehabilitation, as well as advocating for the quality and range of available services needed to improve the employment prospects of persons with visual disabilities. The RACB is pleased to report that the number of competitive employment closures is higher this year than last, representing 34.2% of all successful vocational rehabilitation closures. This compares favorably to the 23.6% of successful cases in FY94. In all, 222 persons were successfully rehabilitated in FY95.

While the improvement in end-of-year statistics for competitive closures sets a positive tone, the year was not without controversy or concerns. First among these was the resignation of the long-term Deputy Director, chief administrator for RSB. This resignation led to the appointment of an interim administrator, then the search and selection process for a permanent replacement. During this process, the Supervisor of Field Operations, the senior person with supervisory control of the vocational rehabilitation effort, left the agency for other employment. Upon the appointment of the new Deputy Director, one of her first actions was to appoint the Coordinator of Special Services, another member of the administrative staff, to the Supervisor of Field Operations position. The result of this appointment has been severe personnel turbulence, with many staff members at program level either moving up to new positions or, in many cases, trying to maintain responsibilities in their previous area of concern while learning their new job duties. Additionally, with the appointment of a District Supervisor to the Coordinator position, there has been a turnover in the district office supervisory staff of 33% within the past two years.

Due mostly to the personnel actions described above, the Agency's Strategic Plan was not fully acted upon during the report period. In August, 1995, a meeting was held with the Executive Committee of the RACB for the purpose of discussing the achievement timelines of the Strategic Plan. The result of that meeting was

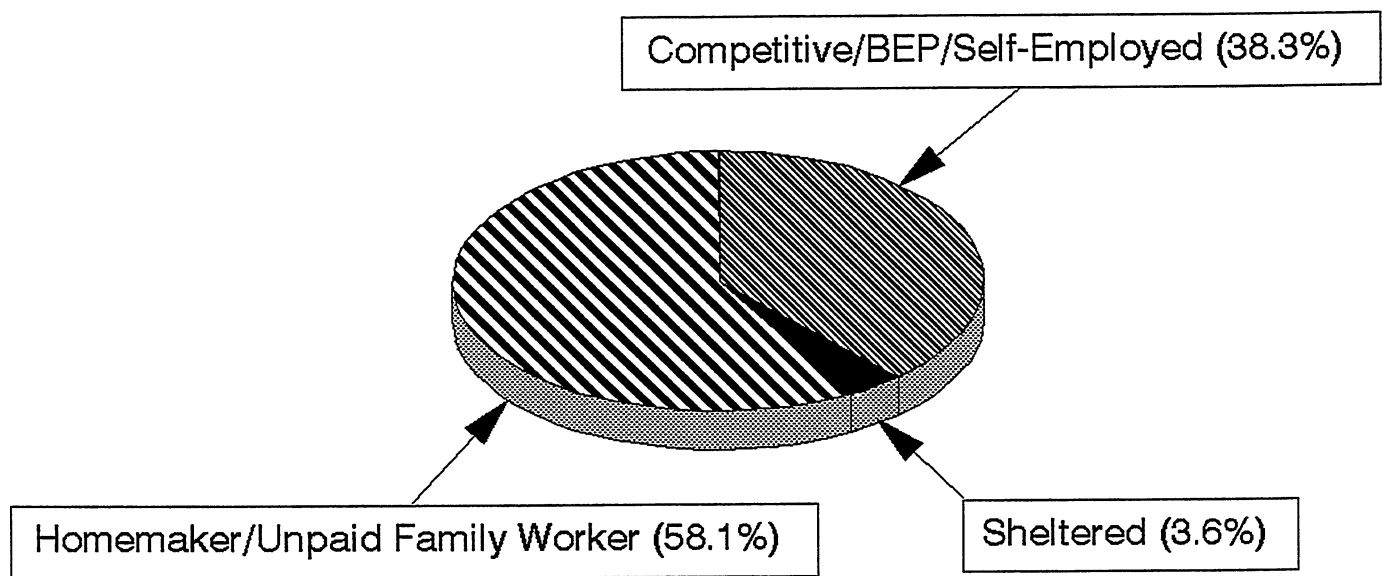
the agreement by the RACB to support RSB's changing many of the 1994-1995 action steps proposed in the Strategic Plan to 1995-1996 timelines. This resulted in a Strategic Plan update for 1995 which was largely unchanged from the previous year.

Another area of concern which carried forward from the previous Deputy Director's term was RSB's relations with consumer groups. Two main issues were involved; 1) the impartial distribution of information about consumer groups, and 2) RSB support of activities involving the consumer groups. In July, 1995, RSB adopted a new policy regarding the provision of information about consumer groups designed to reduce staff's involvement with the process, thereby reducing any hint of favoritism. Also in July, 1995, RSB co-sponsored Student Network, a seminar designed to bring together students with visual disabilities for learning and networking experiences, with the Missouri Council of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri. It is the hope that this will be the first of many successful collaborations of these three entities, emphasizing the need for cooperation in their shared mission of service to Missourians who are blind.

While these concerns show that not all aspects of the vocational rehabilitation program are in keeping with the highest expectations of the RACB, there is genuine cause for optimism. With the personnel changes of the past year behind us, with the cessation of much of the difficulty between the RSB and the consumer groups, and with the promise of a new focus on employment and staff development, RSB could surpass the achievements of the past in providing quality rehabilitation services in a timely fashion to the blind of Missouri.

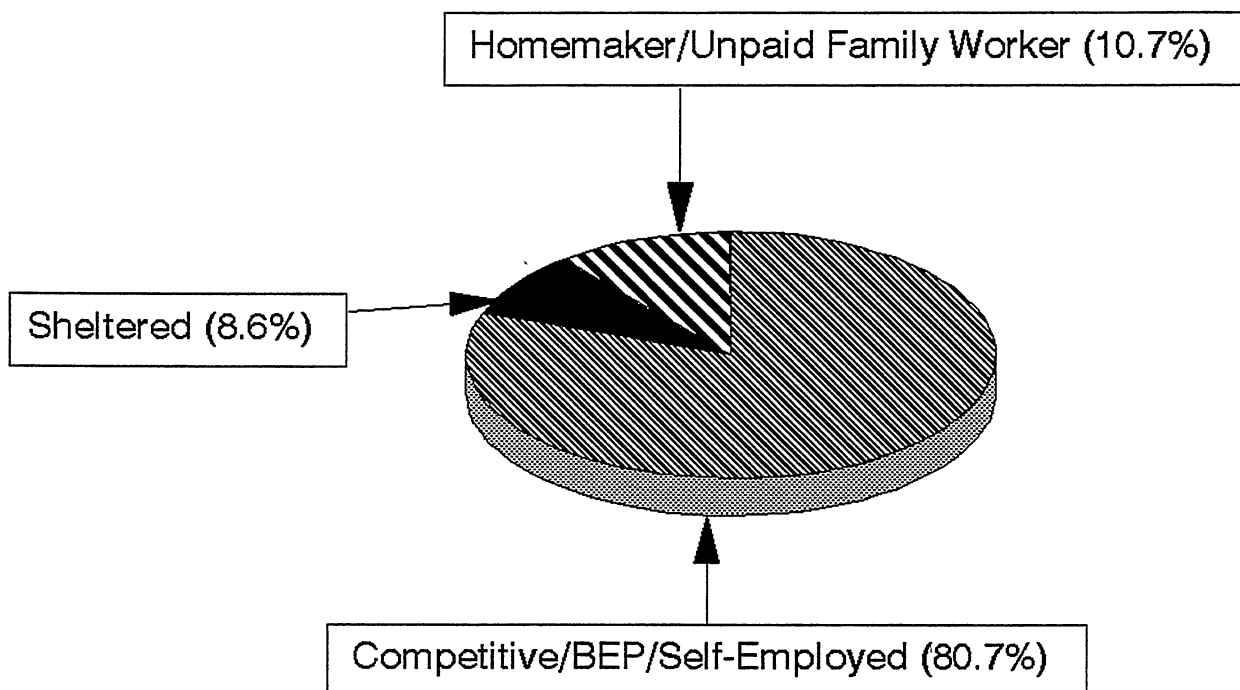
Types of Vocational Closures

by % of total VR closures



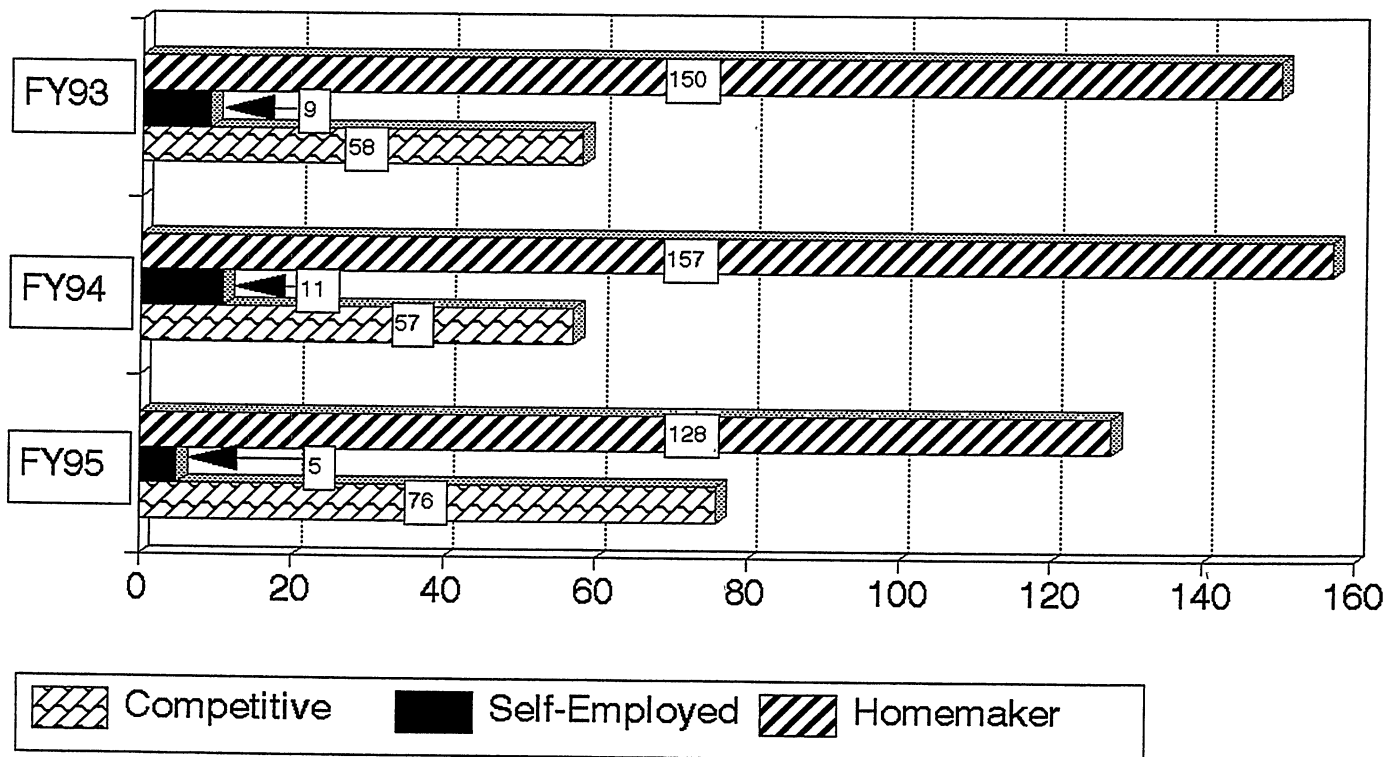
Use of Vocational Rehabilitation Funds

by type of closure in %



Annual Total Vocational Closures

by Federal Fiscal Year and Type



SECTION II: STATUS OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES

STATISTICAL REVIEW OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION DURING FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 1995:

TABLE 1. CASELOAD STATISTICS:

	FY95 / FY94
Total VR Caseload:	1708 / 1548
Referrals:	959 / 934
Eligible:	528 / 495
Close before eligibility established:	401 / 358
Closed as successful (26):	222 / 241
Closed as unsuccessful after IWRP services (28):	88 / 70
Closed as unsuccessful before IWRP services (30):	78 / 61

TABLE 2. SUCCESSFUL CLOSURES (BY TYPE OF EMPLOYMENT):

	FY95 / FY94
Competitive Employment:	76 / 57
Sheltered Employment:	8 / 10
Self-Employed:	5 / 11
Business Enterprise Program:	4 / 5
Homemaker:	128 / 157
Unpaid Family Worker:	1 / 1

During FY 1995, RSB's caseload remained stable, with no marked increases or decreases in the total number of cases, number of referrals, or cases closed as successful/unsuccessful. Of interest is the fact that although RSB's overall number of successful closures (222) declined from 241 in FY94 and 233 in FY93, the number of competitive closures (76) showed an increase from 57 in FY94 and 58 in FY93. This is an increase of 33% in the category of closures most emphasized by the 1992 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act.

COST/INCOME COMPARISON FOR SUCCESSFUL CLOSURES:

A total of \$1,408,364 was expended on case services that resulted in successful closures during the fiscal year. This resulted in an average expenditure of \$6,344 per successful closure. Of the total

expenditure, 10.7% of the funds were expended for Homemaker and Unpaid Family worker closures, 8.6% were expended for Sheltered Employment closures, and 80.7% of the funds were expended for Competitive, BEP and Self-Employment closures. The average expenditure for Sheltered closures was \$15,322. The average cost for each Homemaker or Unpaid Family Worker closure was \$1,153. The average per-case expenditure in Competitive/BEP/Self-Employment was \$13,054. The average weekly wage of successful closures was \$279, which would result in an annual income of \$1,366,298 for consumers, very nearly matching the expenditures required to generate the closures.

REHABILITATION ASSISTANTS:

In 1994, RSB proposed and was approved for additional staffing to support the administrative burden required by the rehabilitation process. These new positions were to be classified as Rehabilitation Assistants (RAs). This position was conceived as a staff multiplier, allowing more time for field staff to spend in client contact and service delivery. RSB received hiring authority in June, 1995 and began hiring for this new job classification. In September, 1995 the initial training session was held for newly hired RAs, as well as those staff who were promoted to the position from within the agency. In a concurrent effort, all positions previously held by Clerk-Typist III's were re-evaluated and upgraded to Clerk IV positions. These positions will exercise supervisory control over the RAs, eliminating the need for field staff to take on a supervisory role. All of the Clerk IVs, attended the RA training conducted by RSB field and administrative staff in September, 1995.

PRISON BRAILLE AND NARRATION CENTER:

The Braille and Narration Center at the Jefferson City Correctional Center provides transcription and recording services for RSB staff, consumers and other agencies upon request. In July, 1995 a proposed budget item for upgrading the equipment used by the prison program was approved by Governor Carnahan. New equipment, including a new braille embosser, computer and translation software has been ordered and will be installed upon arrival. The Jefferson City Correctional Center has consented to move the Braille and Narration Center to new quarters, expanding both the size of the facility and the number of inmates who can be employed in the program.

1-800 NUMBER:

In October 1994, RSB activated a 1-800 number for consumer use statewide. This number will automatically route the call to the appropriate district office, based on the geographical division of areas of responsibility. Consumers who reach a district office may be transferred to other offices based on the needs of the caller.

TELECOMMUNICATION DEVICES FOR THE DEAF:

In 1994, RSB stated in the State Plan that TDD sets would be installed in all district office locations during FY 1995. During the report period, only two district offices were equipped with TDD sets, neither permanently installed due to phone line constraints.

RELATIONSHIP WITH CONSUMER GROUPS:

During the period of this report, RSB has experienced considerable difficulty in fostering cooperative relationships with Missouri's consumer groups. Due to the importance that involvement in consumer groups holds in improving rehabilitation outcomes within their membership, RSB has sought to create an atmosphere of cooperation. Toward that end, RSB held meetings with the Missouri Council of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri to develop a method for providing information to RSB consumers about consumer groups without favoritism. In July, 1995 RSB implemented a new policy concerning the provision of information to consumers about consumer groups.

During FY 1995, RSB held meetings with the Missouri Council of the Blind and the National Federation of the Blind of Missouri regarding a mentor program designed to connect consumers of RSB services with selected mentors from a consumer group in order to allow consumers to gain insight into adjustment to blindness and peer support, in addition to providing a positive role model to exhibit the person who is blind as capable, productive and successful citizens. This program was originally proposed during FY 1994 by the Missouri Council of the Blind; however, no consumers took part during that period of time. RSB is continuing to meet with the consumer groups in order to develop a policy which would support the use of the mentor program, with mentors provided by both consumer organizations. Mentors will be required to undergo a background check, attend an orientation session and be willing to travel at their own expense to perform mentoring services.

In July, 1995, RSB took part in the first session of Student Network to be jointly-sponsored by the MCB and NFB. Originating as a program sponsored by the NFB, RSB began supporting students' attendance in 1990. With the involvement of the MCB in 1995, Student Network brought together 46 students from secondary and post-secondary schools from throughout the state for a weekend seminar aimed at improving their understanding of issues related to students with disabilities, self-improvement and networking.

STATE READER'S FUND:

In October, 1994, RSB began taking over the responsibility of administering Missouri's Readers for the Blind Program. Under the new program, students who are visually eligible and attending Missouri schools, colleges and universities would apply for reader funds directly from RSB. This contrasts with the past method of applying to a County Commission for reader services with much resultant confusion. Along with the streamlining of the application process, the amount of funds available for reader services for an individual was raised from \$300 to \$500 annually. This action was taken due to strong consumer advocacy efforts with the Missouri Legislature.

CHANGES IN CONSUMER REIMBURSEMENT:

Following the receipt of comments in public hearings that RSB's reimbursement rates for consumer meals and mileage were inadequate, on October 1, 1994 RSB submitted a change to the Administrative Rule to reflect parity between staff and consumers. Consumers now receive the same reimbursement for meals and mileage as Division of Family Services employees.

REMOVAL OF THE ECONOMIC NEEDS TEST FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION:

Following discussion with the Rehabilitation Advisory Council for the Blind, RSB removed the economic needs test from the vocational rehabilitation program effective March 30, 1995. Since that date, the only vocational rehabilitation service offered by RSB which requires needs-testing is maintenance. Efforts were undertaken during Federal FY 1995 to identify the extent of the impact of removing the needs test from maintenance. A committee consisting of RSB field and administrative staff has been appointed and will meet during the 1st Quarter, Federal FY 1996 to develop options for either the removal of the needs test for maintenance or simplification of the computation for maintenance.

REMOVAL OF CAPS ON SERVICE EXPENDITURES:

At the August, 1994 meeting of the RACB, RSB presented the need to remove absolute limits or "caps" from service expenditure levels. Following debate, the RACB endorsed the removal of all "caps" from expenditure levels. These caps were replaced by "trigger points", beyond which any expenditure would be subject to review by a designated review panel, including members of the RACB. Subsequent communication with RSA Region VII staff indicated that Advisory Council members should not be directly involved in specific case actions. All expenditures beyond the trigger points will be reviewed by the Deputy Director or her designee. This policy went into effect March 30, 1995.

COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAM ACTIVITIES:

Comments received during the public hearings in Spring, 1994 showed concern on the part of consumers that there was no community rehabilitation program in the St. Louis area similar to the program in Kansas City (Rehabilitation Institute). RSB is currently exploring several options to determine if such a facility would be viable and to identify programs which would be interested in providing these services in the St. Louis area.

Comments received from consumers indicated that many RSB consumers were being sent to community rehabilitation programs outside of Missouri rather than to an in-state program. In response to this comment and to support the concept of client choice, all RSB consumers considering attendance at a community rehabilitation program will be provided with information concerning all contracted programs (both in- and out-of-state) and will choose the program that they wish to attend. They must verify that they have been provided information on all contracted programs and respond in writing as to their choice.

PERSONNEL ISSUES:

Several personnel issues have had an impact on the availability and quality of rehabilitation services in Missouri. In December, 1994, the Deputy Director, DFS/RSB resigned to accept employment outside of the state. An interim Deputy Director was appointed and worked with the agency pending the search/selection process for a new Deputy Director. In April, 1995, a new Deputy Director was selected and appointed.

Concurrent with this appointment, the Supervisor of Field Operations resigned to accept other employment with the Division of Family Services, the parent organization of RSB. The Coordinator of Special Services for RSB was appointed to the Supervisor's position through an emergency appointment, without competitive interviews. This appointment drew comment from the Advisory Council, who stated their position that particularly key positions should be filled through the standard method of applicant search and competitive interview, ensuring that RSB would have the greatest possible opportunity to identify and attract the most talented person for the position. The Deputy Director explained that she must be allowed to use all of the options provided by Missouri's Merit System to seek out and appoint the best personnel for positions within the agency.

In April, 1994 the Supervisor of the St. Louis-North district office was promoted to the position of Assistant Deputy Director, RSB. Interviews were held in August, 1994, for the Supervisor's position, but no selection was made from the applicants interviewed. A request for a new list of applicants in February,

1995 produced the same list of eligibles as that used for the interviews conducted in August, 1994. The position remained vacant until July 1, 1995, when an appointment was made to fill the position. This appointment was done as a "re-employment", that is, the hiring of a former DFS employee, again without competitive interviews taking place. When questioned by the Advisory Council on this matter, the Deputy Director stated that the person appointed to the position had already been contacted and recruited for the position by DFS officials before the new Deputy Director assumed her position. The Advisory Council reiterated their previous objection to hiring for key positions without advertisement of the vacancy and competitive interviews. During the subsequent hiring of a new Coordinator of Special Services, competitive interviews were held.

There has existed an ongoing problem with maintaining sufficient staff to provide services in the Kansas City district office, the largest in RSB. This difficulty has continued for the last eight years. This shortage of staff is indicative of the shortage of qualified personnel available throughout Missouri. Currently, there is one program for preparation of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors in Missouri, and no programs for preparation of Mobility Instructors or Rehabilitation Teachers for the Blind. Due to salary inequities with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (Missouri's General VR agency), RSB has been unsuccessful in attracting graduates of the solitary in-state counseling program. In August, 1994, an Assistant District Supervisor position was approved to assist the District Supervisor in personnel, administrative and supervisory matters. It is hoped that this position will ease the administrative burden on the supervisory staff, allowing for improved training, supervision and management of the Kansas City office.

TRANSITION:

During the period of this report, RSB has undertaken efforts to increase agency activity in the area of transition of students from school to work. Chief among these efforts is the draft of a transition policy, a document developed in a joint effort with DVR and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). This policy was presented at five joint meetings throughout the state to discuss implementation and the process for referral to RSB and DVR under the proposed policy. It is projected that the final draft will be available for review and comment during the 1st Quarter of Federal FY 1996.

EQUIPMENT LOAN PROGRAM:

During 1994, RSB instituted an equipment loan program to provide assistive technology items to clients in a more timely fashion. An inventory of these items was maintained in the RSB State Office and the inventory was made available to the district offices for

request as needed. In August, 1995, RSB eliminated the loan program due to: 1) a lack of use of the program, 2) equipment which was on-hand for inordinate periods of time leading to technology currency and warranty difficulties, and 3) the improvement of equipment ordering procedures which led to improved turn-around time for equipment orders. In 1994, RSB received approval from the Office of Administration to order equipment directly from vendors, followed by submission of the request for purchase through the State's purchasing system, thereby shortening the wait-time for consumer equipment dramatically. All stocks from the loan program have been sent to district offices for distribution to consumers and replacements will not be ordered. District offices have been authorized to order and maintain equipment for this purpose in their offices, relevant to the demand in each district.

SECTION III - RSB STRATEGIC PLAN

Pursuant to the 1992 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, RSB developed a strategic planning document for the first time in 1993. During June, 1994, RSB held a strategic planning session with staff, Advisory Council members and consumer input with the intent of creating a plan for future guidance of rehabilitation services provided to the blind of Missouri. The Advisory Council met in May, 1995 to review the 1995 update to the Strategic Plan. Following this meeting, the Council requested that RSB prepare a report detailing the objectives and action steps for which a one year extension of due date was being requested. During August, 1995, the Executive Committee of the Advisory Council met by teleconference to review the goals and objectives of the Strategic Plan as proposed for 1995 and to discuss the change of achievement timelines for those goals and objectives. Approval of these changes in achievement timelines resulted in a Strategic Plan largely unchanged from 1994. The following list identifies actions taken toward accomplishing the goals and objectives as stated in the Strategic Plan which guided agency changes during the period of this report (October 1, 1994 - September 30, 1995), followed by a listing of those goals and objectives which have not been accomplished during the report period.

ACTIONS TAKEN ON STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS DURING FY 1995:

GOAL 1: To Increase Competitive Employment for Persons in Missouri Who Are Blind:

-No Employment Committee meetings have been held. There has, however, been a counselor focus group meeting that dealt with this issue. The group made the recommendation that a meeting be convened with district supervisors, the supervisor of field operations and the individual supervising the job development/placement specialist. The purpose of the meeting was to allow all parties with interest in the employment focus of the agency to discuss and reach consensus on key issues facing field staff.

-A new Job Development Specialist was appointed in September, 1995.

-District offices are continuing to identify and take part in job/career fairs.

-Employer brochure has been completed and is in distribution.

-The Advisory Council recommended that RSB utilize the Missouri Employment Security job bank instead of continuing efforts to develop an in-house system. RSB is currently working with Employment Security on an interface for inter-agency use. No projection has been made on possible completion date.

-Initial training in job development/job placement/job search skills has been provided to all counselors.

-Request for Proposal was distributed to employment companies to obtain proposals to train RSB staff and consumers in current job search techniques. Contracts were obtained with three vendors during 4th Quarter, FY 1995.

-RSB staff provided training in blindness on a case-by-case basis to supported employment vendors.

-RSB has asked the Advisory Council to look into the possibility of further simplifying the contracting process for supported employment vendors.

-The Advisory Council has recommended that a committee be appointed to work on development of a Council plan for increasing consumer involvement.

-The Advisory Council has been asked to appoint a consumer member to take part in the RSB Employment Committee.

-Public relations package was distributed to all District Offices and other interested parties.

-An action plan was developed which fully includes BEP in RSB's marketing strategy.

GOAL 2: To Recruit and Retain Qualified RSB Staff:

-Initial guidelines for mentoring new staff were proposed.

-A suggested agency internship program was proposed. RSB's training technician has been asked to review the proposal and develop possibilities.

-Information regarding salaries for counselors, district supervisors and support staff was gathered via RehabNet. Responses were obtained from 21 agencies and compiled into a report.

-Focus groups were formed and meetings were held for all job classes in the agency.

-Training in behavioral interviewing was conducted for all agency supervisors in June, 1995.

GOAL 3: To Create an Integrated System of Community-based VR Services that Facilitates the Transitions Between Service Systems and Enhances the Community Integration Needs of RSB Consumers:

-RSB has continued to meet with other agencies to update/create new cooperative agreements.

GOAL 4: Increase the Ability of RSB Consumers to Demonstrate the Appropriate Skills Required to Function Independently at a Level Commensurate with Their Desired Employment:

The committee drafted proposed recommendations on requiring appropriate skills of consumers which were submitted to the Advisory Council. The recommendations were not adopted.

GOAL 6: To Facilitate Successful Transition from School to Post-Secondary Education, Training and Employment, or from Unemployment to Employment, by a Larger Number of Individuals Who are Blind:

The Advisory Council's committee on the use of paraprofessionals to teach braille has met with Department of Elementary and Secondary Education officials and is currently exploring methods of certifying paraprofessionals for participation in the program.

GOAL 7: To Increase RSB's Visibility in the Community to Improve and Enhance its Ability to Achieve its Goals:

- Agency brochures have been received and are in distribution.
- Braille cards are now available throughout the agency.
- Large print calendars have been ordered for 1996.
- Close to having script for two videos which are being developed to target employers and the general public.
- Two Public Service Announcements were written and submitted to Office of Communications for revision/editing.
- Preprinted Roladex cards were purchased and are being distributed to staff.
- Information is being collected to put together kits for staff to use in making presentations.

GOAL 9: To Reduce Disincentives to Work:

-RSB wrote to the St. Charles County Transit Authority to support efforts to make public transportation more accessible to persons who are blind.

ACTIONS PLANNED BUT NOT COMPLETED FOR FY 1995:

The following actions were planned for completion in 1994-1995; however, the completion dates were extended to 1995-1996 in the 1995 update to the Strategic Plan.

GOAL 1: To Increase Competitive Employment for Persons in Missouri Who Are Blind:

- The development of a policy for funding of costs for participation in employment fairs and other employer-related activities
- Development of a target list of organizations to approach for membership to enhance networking possibilities
- Establishment of a sub-committee of the Employment Committee to develop procedures for Business Advisory Committees
- Establishment of Business Advisory Committees in each District Office
- Evaluation of the number of OJTs that result in competitive employment
- Analysis of OJT utilization
- Training for VR Counselors and District Supervisors on utilization of OJTs
- The Rehabilitation Advisory Council for the Blind's development of a plan to increase consumer involvement in rehabilitation
- BEP's quarterly presentations to all clients entering status "10"
- Exploration of the use of BEP facilities for work-readiness evaluation of VR consumers

GOAL 2: To Recruit and Retain Qualified RSB Staff:

- Development of Individual Development Plans (IDPs)
- Scheduling of training based on IDP results
- Implementation of a mentor program
- Development of guidelines for an internship program
- Coordination with Office of Administration on accessibility of Merit System test materials
- Development of a standardized method of procurement of services and equipment
- Development of an improved method of disseminating policy material

GOAL 3: To Create an Integrated System of Community-based VR Services that Facilitates the Transitions Between Service Systems and Enhances the Community Integration Needs of RSB Consumers:

- Development of a statewide resource guide
- Search for and adopt an existing resource database

GOAL 5: Improve the Knowledge and Utilization of "State-of-the-art" Assistive Technology for RSB Consumers and Staff:

- Analysis of quality and availability of assistive technology resources
- Development of standards for quality and availability of assistive technology resources
- Training on the automated case management system

GOAL 6: To Facilitate Successful Transition from School to Post-Secondary Education, Training and Employment, or from Unemployment to Employment, by a Larger Number of Individuals Who are Blind:

- Utilization of job clubs and seminars

GOAL 7: To Increase RSB's Visibility in the Community to Improve and Enhance its Ability to Achieve its Goals:

- Assessment of the need for a tracking system to gather referral data to determine marketing effectiveness
- Development of a presentation format for public presentations
- Submission of an article for inclusion in the Missouri Career Guide
- Listing of all RSB offices in more easily found location in all phone books

GOAL 8: to Increase the Empowerment of Consumers:

- Review of consumer satisfaction with their empowerment

GOAL 9: To Reduce Disincentives to Work:

- Provision of information to RSB staff on child care options
- Discussion with the Advisory Council about accomodation issues involving transportation
- Discussion with the Advisory Council about evaluation of available child care options

SECTION IV - ACTIVITIES OF THE REHABILITATION ADVISORY COUNCIL DURING FY 1995

OVERVIEW OF COUNCIL MEETINGS:

The Council held four meetings during FY 1995. These meetings were held in St. Louis, Kansas City, Jefferson City and St. Joseph. All of the meetings were advertised in advance and were open to the public.

In addition to the regularly scheduled meetings, Council members took part in advocacy efforts throughout the state, including committees involved with braille literacy, transition, transportation efforts and program/policy change. Council members took part in many of RSB's public hearings, often acting as ombudsmen for the consumers by bringing matters of concern and interest to the agency's administrative staff.

Since the inception of the Council, there have been four resignations and 14 current members' terms have expired. One member of the original group of appointments has never been confirmed and the nomination for the final vacancy has been pending action since January, 1994. Six of the original members who have requested reappointment have been reappointed; however, inaction in response to nominations for the Council has led to stagnation of the membership, a reduced number of persons to effectively meet the demands on the Council and persons serving on the Council without clear indication of their "official" status.

During the four meetings held in FY 1995, the following topics represent the broad range of matters brought before the Council:

CULTURAL DIVERSITY:

The Council has continued its work on the cultural diversity initiative in an effort to improve rehabilitation services to consumers from traditionally underserved areas. At the November, 1994 meeting, Dr. Richard Presberry, Director of the Region VII Rehabilitation Cultural Diversity Initiative, gave a presentation related to understanding cultural differences and their effect on the provision of services to minorities. At the August, 1995 meeting the Advisory Council invited Walter Harper, President of the St. Joseph Chapter of the NAACP, to speak to the group on how RSB might more successfully identify and serve consumers from minority communities.

JOBS CONSOLIDATION:

The Council discussed concerns about jobs consolidation legislation at every meeting held during FY 1995. Due to concerns expressed at these meetings, the Council joined in the nationwide effort to have rehabilitation removed from both the House and Senate bills under

consideration. The Council sent letters to all members of the Missouri delegation in the U.S. Congress, asking them to support amendments proposed to remove rehabilitation from both HR 1617 and S143.

CONSUMER SATISFACTION SURVEYS:

In its effort to gain further consumer input, the Advisory Council reviewed and adopted a new "all-services" survey which will be sent to consumers upon closure of their rehabilitation program. A survey targeted to consumers who attend community rehabilitation programs is also being revised by a committee of the Advisory Council.

CONSUMER STANDARDS:

Following discussion of a draft policy proposing standards for consumers as pre-conditions to authorization of some services, the Council voted to reject the idea. The Council did, however, develop and adopt a position statement which outlines a plan to better prepare consumers for achieving their vocational goal. A committee has been formed consisting of an equal number of Council members and RSB staff which will work on implementing the guidelines indicated in this statement.

JOB DEVELOPMENT/JOB PLACEMENT:

The Council studied the actions taken to develop an in-house database program for job placement within the agency and advised RSB that linking up with other agencies' existing systems would be more efficient and cost effective. A presentation was made to the Council by representatives of the Division of Employment Security, describing how RSB staff and consumers will be able to access the Job Bank system.

RSB PLANNING FUNCTIONS:

The Council reviewed and made recommendations for changes in the attachments to the State Plan at the May, 1995 meeting. Also in May, 1995, the Strategic Plan update for 1995 was presented to the Council for review. Following this meeting, the Council requested that RSB provide a report on the status of each action step which remained incomplete. RSB requested that those items which have not met the time guidelines for FY 1995 be extended through FY 1996. During a teleconference in August, 1995, both the retiring and the new Executive Committees approved RSB's request to extend the time guidelines proposed during development of the updated plan.

TIME STUDIES:

A Council member identified a concern with the "time-study" method used by RSB to track the percentage of time rehabilitation teachers

spend with independent living program consumers compared to consumers in the vocational rehabilitation program. The Council recommended that RSB research the "time-study" issue and revise or simplify the report method. The Deputy Director, RSB, presented a proposed new form and methodology for this at the August, 1995 meeting. This form has been provided to RSA with a request that RSB be allowed to implement its use in 1st Quarter, FY 1996.

ESTABLISHMENT GRANTS:

A committee of Advisory Council members was formed at the November, 1994 meeting to study the possibility of utilizing establishment grants for funding the creation of pilot programs for community-based rehabilitation services. Information was requested from other states about similar programs. Material was provided by Florida for their community-based combination of adult education and rehabilitation services.

GRAPHICAL USER INTERFACE:

The Council expressed its concern regarding the effect that the change to graphical user interface (i.e. Windows programs) technology is having on persons with visual disabilities. At the May, 1995 meeting, the Council spoke by conference call with Doug Wakefield of the General Services Administration, Information Technology Center in Washington, DC regarding trends in this area. The Council directed the Chairman to write a letter to be sent to the Office of Administration, Governor Mel Carnahan and other purchasing officials recommending that technology such as 'Windows 95' should not be placed on state purchasing contract until it is accessible to people with visual disabilities.

FAIR HEARING OFFICERS:

At the November, 1994 meeting, the Council reviewed and approved the qualifications of an additional applicant for contract as a Fair Hearing Officer.

CONSUMER NEWSLETTER:

In response to a consumer comment, the Council endorsed the concept of a consumer-oriented newsletter to be published by RSB and distributed to all active consumers, vendors and interested parties. Two Council members volunteered to assist in development of the newsletter. The initial issue is to be presented to the Council during the 1st Quarter, FY 1996.

APPOINTMENT OF PERSONNEL:

Two separate personnel actions drew the Council's attention in respect to the quality and availability of rehabilitation services in Missouri. These were the appointments of a new Supervisor of

Field Operations and the Supervisor of the St. Louis-North District Office.

At the May, 1995 meeting of the Council, the new Deputy Director was asked why there was the need for an emergency appointment to the position of Supervisor of Field Operations. The Council maintained that consumers would be better served if the position had been advertised and the best-qualified candidate chosen following competitive interviews. The Deputy Director stated that as she was new in the Deputy Director's position she thought it crucial to fill the position as quickly as possible. It was the feeling of the Council that only an open and competitive interview process could succeed in identifying and hiring the best possible staff for RSB. Following discussion, the Council passed a motion that in the future job openings should be openly advertised and registers be opened to allow interested persons the opportunity to apply.

At the August, 1995 meeting of the Council, members asked the Deputy Director about the appointment of the St. Louis-North Supervisor. In light of the motion adopted by the Council at the May, 1995 meeting, the Council felt that it was not in the best interests of consumers for RSB to hire persons without competitive interviews. The Deputy Director explained that the position had been vacant since April, 1994, and that interviews had taken place in August of that year. When no successful applicant was found, a new register of applicants was requested in February, 1995. This register contained the same names as were interviewed in August, 1994. Following this action, the interim Deputy Director and the Director of DFS recruited a former DFS employee to fill the position. The Deputy Director stated that although the decision to appoint someone to this position occurred prior to the May meeting of the Council, (where she was apprised of the Council's concerns), she would make an appointment in similar fashion if she felt that circumstances warranted the action, despite the Council's recommendation.

SECTION V - SUMMARY

During the period of this report, the Rehabilitation Advisory Council has operated within the turbulent environment resulting from key personnel changes at RSB. These changes, with the resultant questioning of roles for agency administrators and the Council, have contributed to the clarification of purpose for the Council and an improved understanding of the Council's role in vocational rehabilitation on the part of the new administrative staff of RSB. With a renewed commitment to fostering change, the Advisory Council will be concentrating its efforts in the next year on the following priorities:

1. Improving services to traditionally underserved

populations. This includes the continuation of efforts to identify and more adequately provide services to persons within the minority community, as well as those persons with low-incidence disabilities (such as deaf-blindness) who have traditionally not achieved outcomes commensurate with those achieved by the majority of RSB's closures.

2. Increasing the number of competitive employment closures achieved by RSB consumers. Although the number of competitive closures during FY 1995 was higher than in previous years, constant effort must be applied to identify and support innovative methods, services, programs and supports which will lead to increased consumer participation in the competitive job market.

3. Helping RSB identify and develop solutions which will increase the time available to field staff members for consumer contact. With the fielding of the Rehabilitation Assistant positions, the staff should experience a lighter administrative workload. The Council will work with RSB as the RA classification is initially fielded, as well as helping to identify other areas where the administrative burden on field staff can be reduced.

4. Understanding the roles and responsibilities of RSB in the provision of services to children. Studies will be conducted in the areas of pre-school (ages 0-3), school age (ages 4-13) and transition-eligible (ages 14-21) children with the purpose of identifying the areas requiring either improvement in services or the need for increased cooperation with other agencies in the hopes of improving their employment prospects before they reach adulthood. In particular, the Council will seek to determine whether RSB's provision of services to children of school age is helpful or harmful to efforts to require the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to provide a "free and appropriate public education" for these children.

